

The exploitation of copper mines in the Great Lakes 6500 years ago

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According to P. David Pompeani et al. (2015), the mining of native copper nuggets on Isle Royale, located on Lake Superior, took place 6500 – 5400 years ago. During that time, tons were removed from the island, and the past mining operations are attributed to Amerindians by North American archaeologists / historians. On the other hand, other researchers have repeatedly brought up the argument that the tons of native copper removed cannot be accounted for in the museums of the Continent as prehistoric artefacts of the copper cultures. They propose that it was most likely exported to meet the needs of the Bronze Age countries across the Atlantic. It is also estimated that over 10 000 people during one thousand years worked in these mines. All of them needed to be housed and fed in this northern climate. Pompeani et al. pointed out that mining ended around 5 400 years ago when the area experienced a severe drought lasting thousands of years.

The reader is referred to a special issue of the *Ancient American* magazine, Volume 5, Number 35, October 2000, on *Prehistoric Copper Miners*.

If copper was exported in prehistoric times from Isle Royale, and from the Keweenaw peninsula in northern Michigan State (see attached map), which contained similar copper deposits as on the island across the Lake, how was this copper taken away? Before thinking of the exportation, another important and pertinent question comes up. How the workers did reached the mining sites?

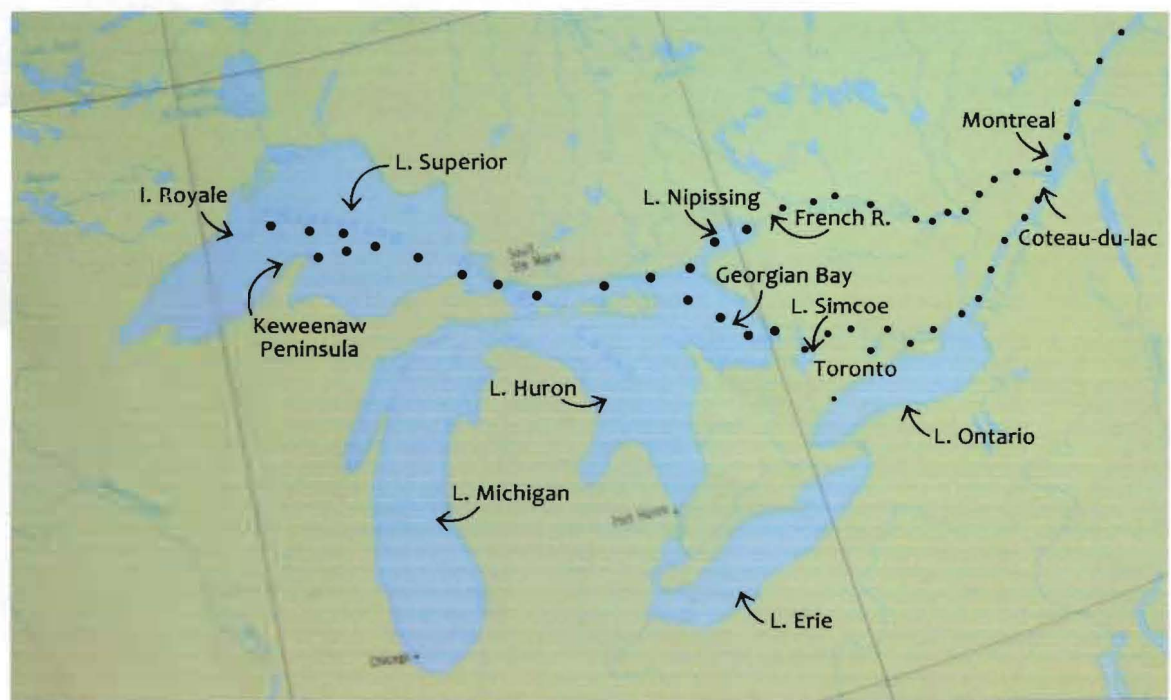
The hypothesis that was brought up in recent years was that the in and out river communication between the outside world and Lake Superior was via the French River connecting from the Ottawa and the St Lawrence Rivers, and leading into Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, and finally to the west end of Lake Superior. According to a map by the Geological Survey of Canada published in 1987, and which illustrates the Great Lakes area **5 000 years ago** this river route was open to canoe navigation. It is not the case today as a portage is required between Lake Nipissing and the Ottawa River. This most likely happened as a result of an isostatic uplift of the earth crust following the retreat of the glaciers

According to the same map, there was another river connection between the St Lawrence R. and Lake Superior. Beginning at the southeast end of Georgian Bay, there appears to have been a connection via Lake Simcoe, Lake Ontario and the St Lawrence River. Again here, this connection does not exist anymore and has been interrupted most likely by a geological disturbance as mentioned above. However, there is now a man made waterway, the Trent-Severn Canal built in the 19 century. It provides a link between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron (Georgian Bay) on a 386 km voyage with 44 locks. According to mainstream historians, the Trent / Severn waterway was an ancient trade route which brought copper from the Keweenaw Peninsula in Michigan to Canadian Amerindians (Burcher, 2012).

In my opinion, this second scenario through Lake Simcoe would have been shorter and easier than the French and Ottawa River passages, which have been used in more recent times by French explorers, thus its name, **Rivière des Français**. If the Lake Simcoe option was

followed, the mariners would have had reached the St Lawrence R., and sailed later by Coteau-du-lac and its rapids. This was a very particular place on this journey because a manmade 4 m high promontory overlooking the River and dated over 5 000 years BCE was raised there; it harboured several human red ochre burials. This place could not have been ignored by mariners laden with copper nuggets as they passed by this place where the metal could have been smelted. It is speculative but plausible. A small canal at the base of the promontory, still visible today, may have been used to bypass the rapids in either direction. This waterway was not built by the French colonizers, and was already in place in 1687. Who created it?

The other important turbulent waters to be later faced with were the Lachine Rapids, located just as you arrive at the level of the Island of Montreal. A land trail on the north shores of the River was essential to bypass the fierce current. After that it was clear sailing on the St Lawrence R. to reach the Atlantic Ocean.



The Great Lakes region 5 000 years ago, showing the five lakes. It also shows the itinerary river routes between Isle Royale and the Keweenaw Peninsula and the French River on the one hand, or via Lake Simcoe and the St Lawrence River on the other. From a Canada Geological Survey map published in 1987.

Prehistoric North America is extraordinarily rich with ruins and archaeological artefacts of all kinds, and out there to be seen. However, the Establishment is blinded by prejudices against their antiquity

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